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INFO RUEHZS/ASSOCIATION OF SOUTHEAST ASIAN NATIONS PRIORITY
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RUEHBY/AMEMBASSY CANBERRA PRIORITY 9523
RUEHNE/AMEMBASSY NEW DELHI PRIORITY 5542
RUEHUL/AMEMBASSY SEOUL PRIORITY 5347
RUEHKO/AMEMBASSY TOKYO PRIORITY 1471
RUEHCHI/AMCONSUL CHIANG MAI PRIORITY 6345
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RUCNDT/USMISSION USUN NEW YORK PRIORITY 5415
RUEAIIA/CIA WASHINGTON DC PRIORITY
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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 BANGKOK 000719

SIPDIS

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SUBJECT: AMBASSADOR ENGAGES ON BURMA POLICY WITH EUROPEAN
COUNTERPARTS, SPECIAL ENVOY FASSINO

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Classified By: Ambassador Eric G. John, reason 1.4 (b) and (d)

11. (C) SUMMARY. Ambassador met EU Special Envoy to Burma Piero Fassino and other European officials March 20 to discuss policy towards Burma prior to Fassino's upcoming visit to Burma. Ambassador noted the ongoing USG Burma policy review, explaining in general terms the issues on which the USG would focus. Fassino asserted that it was important to engage civil society members in Burma and encourage them to participate in the upcoming 2010 election. He believed that there was a possibility that some Burmese outside of the current regime could be elected to parliament, and it was important to encourage this change now. Fassino stated that it was important for a political dialogue to continue to occur between the regime and representatives of Burmese society, that political prisoners should be set free, and that electoral law should be reformed. An accompanying EU official said the UN should be the lead agency for observing the Burmese elections, should the international community and the Burmese regime agree on acceptable conditions. End Summary.

EU ENVOY IN BANGKOK, ON THE WAY TO BUMRA

12. (C) Ambassador, accompanied by Poloff, attended a March 20 breakfast hosted by Czech Ambassador to Thailand Ivan Hotek, representing the Czech EU Presidency, for EU Special Envoy for Burma Piero Fassino. Head of the Delegation of the European Commission David Lipman, EU election specialist Leo Nordholt, and several others were in attendance for a discussion of policy towards Burma. Fassino commented that he was concerned about the international community's strategy in the run-up to Burma's 2010 election. He noted that neither sanctions nor economic and political engagement were working in terms of encouraging reform. A review of policy was in order for the international community.

13. (C) Fassino stated that there were three main objectives that he would pursue on Burma: first, dialogue must occur between the GOB and political opposition; second, continued advocacy for the release of more political prisoners; third, pressure for electoral law reform that would allow for the equality of all participants in the 2010 elections. He stated that he was concerned that the third objective may not be met.

¶4. (C) Fassino cautioned that the 2010 election should be looked at as a first step, not as an endpoint. He hoped that Burma might somehow evolve in a manner similar to Indonesia's shift from authoritarianism to democracy. He stated that he would like to accelerate this process in Burma, but acknowledged that, compared to Indonesia under Suharto, the Burmese regime was much stronger and the opposition was much weaker. Nevertheless, although the election law had serious flaws, the EU needed to decide whether to work with the Burmese to get the best election process possible, or to decide that the process was too flawed to even begin to work with. The latter path would likely result in even less influence in the future by the EU on democratization in Burma. EU specialist Nordholt mentioned the importance of election monitoring, highlighting the role of EU electoral observation missions. He said the EU would like to support the United Nations as the lead electoral observer in Burma.

POLICY REVIEW IN WASHINGTON, LOOKING TO 2010

¶5. (C) Ambassador stated that the U.S. was currently focusing on how best to advance political reform in Burma in its ongoing policy review. Any successful policy, however, would hinge on positive steps taken by the Burmese regime.

¶6. (C) Fassino asserted the importance of engaging with civil society in Burma; by engaging civil society figures and encouraging them to participate in the election, perhaps there could be some changes in leadership in the parliament. He believed it was better for opponents of the regime to participate in the elections rather than to boycott them. Ambassador commented that the law was written to favor the

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Burmese regime, the military, and other SPDC supporters. Finding a way to support or work with such a flawed process would be difficult.

TRIPARTITE CORE GROUP (TCG)

¶7. (C) Ambassador expressed concern about how the GOB was undermining the TCG's effectiveness. He stated that the U.S. would work with the EU, UN, Japan, ASEAN, and other key players to address this issue. Fassino commented that humanitarian relief must be increased in the areas destroyed by the cyclone. This would send a good message to civil society in Burma regarding international commitment there.

¶8. (C) Czech Ambassador Hotek stated that he was interested in seeing the TCG's efforts expanded to other areas of Burma besides just the Irrawaddy Delta region -- such as to Rohingya areas of Rakhine State -- but he added that this would be up to ASEAN. He mentioned that he was concerned that the money allotted through the TCG wasn't making it to local Burmese citizens.

FASSINO INTEREST IN VISITING WASHINGTON

¶9. (SBU) Note: Envoy Fassino mentioned his interest in going to Washington to discuss Burma with State Department officials.
JOHN